

September 2014



BLADENSBURG

LANGLEY PARK

SUITLAND

SAFE ACCESS TO RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES BLUEPRINT

Executive Summary

I. PROJECT BACKGROUND

In 2012, the Institute for Public Health Innovation (IPHI) received funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Community Transformation Grant (CTG) to reduce chronic disease rates, prevent the development of secondary conditions and address health disparities in Prince George’s County, MD. IPHI focused its efforts on three Prince George’s County communities: Bladensburg/East Riverdale, Langley Park and Suitland/Coral Hills.

Safe Access to Recreational Opportunities (SARO) is a strategy focused on increasing access to healthy and safe physical environments in order to improve physical activity. In addition to SARO, IPHI also funds strategies that increase access to and affordability of healthy foods for low-income families and improve delivery of clinical preventive services through the use of community health workers.

In partnership with Prince George’s County Executive’s Transforming Neighborhoods Initiative (TNI), the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), GP RED, Wildflower Consulting and the National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC), IPHI completed an in-depth assessment of connectivity and safety within a study area of a ½ to 1 mile radius around the Bladensburg, Langley Park and Suitland Community Centers. This collaboration aimed to create safe access to recreation opportunities so that children, youth, and families can confidently walk or bicycle to these locations and feel secure in these spaces. The Blueprint builds upon existing efforts led by state and county officials and proposes a cross-sector action plan focused on improving active living opportunities within these communities.

II. LOCAL CONTEXT

Bordered on the south and east by Washington DC, Prince George’s is the third largest county in population size in the Washington metro with a population of 881,419 residents. IPHI selected the focus communities to build upon the County Executive’s Transforming Neighborhoods Initiative. This initiative focuses on uplifting a total of six neighborhoods that face significant economic, health, public safety, and educational challenges.

The health of Prince Georgians is negatively impacted by low consumption of fruits and vegetables and below average participation in physical activity, contributing to high rates of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. Improving connectivity within neighborhoods and to areas where residents can engage in physical activity will remove barriers to active, healthy behaviors such as walking or biking instead of driving to destinations.

III. CROSS-SECTOR LEADERSHIP TEAM

To guide and support the planning, implementation and evaluation of our collective CTG effort, IPHI created and convened a cross-sector Leadership Team representing the sectors needed to accomplish project outcomes, had the authority to influence public and administrative policies, could authorize the use of public resources and facilitate integration. This

team included high-level leadership from: local elected office (County Council, County Executive’s Office), Prince George’s Health Department, a Federally Qualified Health Center, M-NCPPC, Prince George’s Public Schools, Prince George’s County Police Department, and the Department of Social Services.

IV. SARO ACTIVITIES

Consistent with the health and public safety goals enumerated in the Prince George’s County Approved General Plan and Parks and Recreation: 2010 and Beyond, the overall goal of Safe Access to Recreational Opportunities (SARO) is to increase the number of people with access to healthy safe physical environments. In order to achieve this goal, IPHI collaborated with a diverse team of partners to: conduct a policy analysis; engage residents and partners in community based participatory approaches to identify needs, opportunities, and barriers; facilitate workshops; and develop the Blueprint. Input from residents along with an environmental scan and data analysis informed the development of strategies and recommendations.

View the table below for a summary of participation for each SARO activity in each focus community.

[TABLE 1] SARO PARTICIPANT SUMMARY

Date	Activity	B*	LP*	S*	Total
10/17-19/13; 10/25-26/13	Youth PhotoVoice	13	17	21	52
10/28/13	Youth Umap	12	15	5	32
10/25/13	Community Tours	8	8	5	23
10/28/13	PGCDPR Staff Umap Orientation		n/a		12**
10/29/13	Leadership Forums	17	18	24	49
1/28-30/14	Community Connectivity Forums	13	6	29	48
4/22-23/14	Facilitative Leadership Training		n/a		3**

* B – Bladensburg | LP – Langley Park | S – Suitland

** Participants were recruited across the focus communities and not necessarily representative of one community.

A. *Environmental Scan*

A review of planning studies, current projects and recent policy changes related to public health, community development, transportation, housing and long-range planning was conducted to understand the project areas and identify opportunities for collaboration.

C. *Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design*

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) refers to the effective design and use of the built environment to encourage a reduction in the perception of crime and the actual number of crimes, as well as an improvement in community safety and overall quality of life in a community. Three Basic Training sessions and one Training of Trainers session were held for community members, police officers, and County staff. Forty-nine county agency staff and community members received Basic Training, and 15 officers from the Prince George’s County, MD Police Department, the Maryland-National Capital Park Police, Prince George’s County Division, and the Bladensburg Police Department participated in the Training of Trainers.

D. *Safe Routes to Play*

Safe Routes to Play (SRTP) is a youth-centered planning process that helps communities assess connectivity between neighborhoods and parks, playgrounds, trails and natural areas for children and families, focuses on methods of active transportation, such as walking or biking. SRTP is a concept developed by GPRED suggesting that children are commuters and deserve the choice for active transportation. The SRTP components included:

- **Community Tours:** Tours of each community were conducted to familiarize stakeholders with existing conditions.
- **PhotoVoice:** Youth engaged in this photojournalism activity documenting barriers to active transportation and connectivity barriers and provided their insights and proposed solutions.
- **Umap:** Youth provided their perspective on how they travel within the target communities, documenting their routes and methods of transportation.
- **PhotoVoice and Umap Orientation:** M-NCPPC staff participated in a two-hour orientation in Umap and PhotoVoice techniques.
- **Leadership Forums:** Community leaders and county staff assessed and analyzed opportunities to improve safe access to recreational opportunities.
- **Community Connectivity Forums:** Community residents discussed opportunities to improve safety and connectivity.
- **Facilitative Leadership Training:** Three community leaders attended a three-day training to develop facilitative leadership skills to support the advancement of the SARO strategies
- **Policy and Trends Analysis:** GPRED and Wildflower Consulting, LLC conducted an assessment of state, county and local plans and policies relating to active, non-motorized travel.
- **Active Transportation Access Inventory and Analysis:** GP RED assessed gaps in community connectivity and safe access to parks and recreation destinations and provided four maps and related analysis.

V. KEY ISSUES & OBSERVATIONS

The following key issues and observations were compiled through the CPTED and SRTP activities and document review, with extensive input from communities, local leadership, and youth.

A. *Key Issues Analysis Matrix*

The SARO Key Issues Analysis Matrix (Table 2) consolidates findings and designates issues as minor concerns,

opportunities to improve, or key issues/priorities. Cross-cutting key issues included gang activity around Parks and Recreation areas, limited community and youth engagement, the need to improve infrastructure to support safe walking and biking, and the implementation of policies facilitating use of community centers.

[TABLE 2] THE SARO KEY ISSUES ANALYSIS MATRIX

KEY ISSUE RATING SCALE PURPLE - exists in plan, policy, project GREEN - minor concern YELLOW - opportunity to improve BLUE - key issue/priority	Service Areas			Qualitative Data				Quantitative Data				Best Practice or Possible Solutions
	Bladensburg	Langley Park	Suitland	SARO Meetings	Leadership Forum	Community Connectivity Forum	Previous Plans, Policies & Projects	Photovoice	Umap	CPTED Assessment	Active Access GIS Analysis	
Cross Cutting Issues												
Incidence of crime, e.g., gang activity along walking routes & perceptions of safety around Parks and Recreation areas.	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Purple	Blue	Blue	Blue	White	Increase foot and bicycle patrols in collaboration with Parks and County Police; Expand Wellness Zones to include parks and trails; Publish/distribute trail safety guide, add volunteer patrols. Implement DPR recommendation for CPTED activities.
Community Engagement												
Limited youth/community engagement in affecting change	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Purple	Blue	Blue	White	White	Establish Youth participation in County/TNI SARO Quick Response team
Need for more cross sector/ agency/county/state communication	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Blue	Purple	Blue	White	White	White	Establish SARO Quick Response team within TNI structure
Lack of knowledge of parks and recreation opportunities	White	Yellow	White	White	Yellow	Blue	Purple	White	White	White	White	Use social media to connect youth with recreation opportunities
Need for expansion of senior population outreach	Yellow	White	Yellow	White	Yellow	Blue	Purple	White	Yellow	White	White	Discuss perceptions of safety and security concerns
Desire for more active lifestyle events on DPR trails/natural areas	White	Yellow	White	Yellow	Yellow	Blue	Purple	White	White	White	White	Implement staff/youth co-led bicycling and walking groups
Strength of relationships with housing development owners	White	Blue	White	White	White	White	Purple	Blue	White	Yellow	White	Explore formalizing social pathways, improve property maintenance
Lack of promotion of non-motorized travel opportunities	Yellow	White	White	White	White	White	Purple	White	White	White	White	Celebrate and promote existing safe access travel ways
Evidence of trash, litter along travel ways	White	Yellow	White	White	White	White	Purple	Yellow	White	Yellow	White	Establish youth "Green Team" within SARO Implementation effort

[TABLE 2] THE SARO KEY ISSUES ANALYSIS MATRIX (CONTINUED)

	Service Areas			Qualitative Data				Quantitative Data				Best Practice or Possible Solutions
KEY ISSUE RATING SCALE PURPLE - exists in plan, policy, project GREEN - minor concern YELLOW - opportunity to improve BLUE - key issue/priority	Bladensburg	Langley Park	Suitland	SARO Meetings	Leadership Forum	Community Connectivity Forum	Previous Plans, Policies & Projects	Photovoice	Umap	CPTED Assessment	Active Access GIS Analysis	
Infrastructure												
Need for sidewalk improvements near parks and facilities	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Purple	Blue	Blue	Yellow		Target sidewalk improvements within 1/2 mile of community centers
Desire for safe pedestrian access to parks and key destinations	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	White	Purple	Blue	Blue	Yellow		Evaluate street crossings, signage and pavement markings
Excessive traffic speed at intersections and street crossings	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Purple	White	Blue	Yellow		Institute temporary traffic calming measures such as landscaping and signage to reduce speeds and protect pedestrians
Under-utilization of natural surface trails and inadequate lighting conditions along travel routes	White	Blue	Blue	Blue	White	Blue	Purple	Blue	Blue	Yellow		Target lighting assessments to natural surface trails and to 1/2 mile radius around community centers, host clean up days, use signage to encourage trail usage
Social pathways, short-cuts to recreation areas	White	Blue	Blue	White	Blue	Blue	Purple	Blue	White	Yellow		Develop criteria and evaluate formalizing or eliminating social pathways
Gaps in trail and sidewalk connections to recreation areas	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Blue	Purple	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow		Incorporate Umap/PhotoVoice results into existing plans, policies & projects
Lack of protected bicycle lanes, more opportunities for bicycling	Yellow	White	Yellow	White	Yellow	Blue	Purple	White	Yellow	White		Paint shoulders along roadways; experiment with temporary barriers
Use of abandoned areas as parks or community spaces	Yellow	Yellow	White	White	White	White	Purple	Yellow	White	Yellow		Develop community maintained pocket parks
Signage and road markings - lack of multi-lingual signage/Universal Way Finding	Yellow	Yellow	White	White	Yellow	White	Purple	Yellow	White	White		Work with DPR for interpretive signage program at community center
Policy Issues												
Lack of identified funds for SARO implementation	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Green	Purple	White	White	White		Target county agency cross-sector funding and grant applications
Limited youth participation in planning and community engagement	White	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Purple	Blue	Blue	White		Implement Photovoice and Umap activities as a regular DPR program
Excessive traffic speeds around parks and recreation areas	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	White	Blue	Purple	White	White	White		Develop legislation for speed monitoring program
Limited opportunities for active travel	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	White	Yellow	White	Purple	Yellow	Yellow	White		Coordinate Complete Streets Initiatives in local and county planning process

B. Youth Safety Concerns

Findings from youth input were similar across all communities, and the most consistent safety concerns broadly included:

- **Gang and criminal activity:** Threats from other people such as gang members, those involved in criminal activity, older youth or untrusted adult, create a sense of fear.
- **Perception of danger in locations with limited public visibility:** Youth reported locations with limited visibility, such as heavily wooded areas or road underpasses, as dangerous.
- **Frequent use of unsafe routes to reach destinations, including shortcuts or social pathways:** Shortcuts and social pathways through less safe areas are commonly used instead of longer routes that may be safer.

Youth primarily chose their travel routes with regards to walking or biking based on safety, however, they also reported using routes they perceived to be unsafe if it shortened the length of their travel.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SAFE ACCESS TO RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

A. County Wide Recommendations

[TABLE 3] COUNTY WIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation	Rationale
1. Implement Umap and PhotoVoice results into existing plans and projects.	Build upon existing successful youth engagement activities
2. Develop Wellness Zones within parks and recreation facilities.	Utilize existing strategy already implemented in school zones
3. Focus lighting assessments toward area within ½ mile of Bladensburg, Langley Park, and Suitland Community Centers.	Demonstrate attention to youth concerns to improve visibility and security for pedestrians and bicyclists traveling at night
4. Increase safe use of natural surface trails.	Youth and families rely on and would like to utilize natural surface trails to connect to their destinations, but many trails are undocumented and unsupervised
5. Celebrate and promote improvements to infrastructure and policy change.	Build credibility and community awareness of leadership's attention to perceived safety concerns

B. *Community Specific Recommendations*

BLADENSBURG SIGNATURE PROJECT:

- Bladensburg Community Center Active Transportation Enhancements
 - ✦ Formalize social pathways
 - ✦ Implement center crosswalks and internal sidewalk improvements
 - ✦ Create bike skills park at south east corner of community center

[TABLE 4] BLADENSBURG - OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation	Rationale
1. Evaluate sidewalks, pedestrian crossings, connectivity & traffic calming opportunities for Peace Cross, Quincy St. & Lloyd St.	Address known pedestrian safety issues relative to impending housing developments and school related travel.
2. Incorporate striped or signalized pedestrian crossings at Kenilworth Avenue and 450 & St. Mary's Church crossing.	Positively impact known pedestrian safety concerns
3. Transition sharrow markings on Route 450 to a system of painted and protected bike lanes, or explore alternative route on low traffic volume corridor.	Address ineffectiveness of sharrow marking system on high speed, heavy traffic flow corridor
4. Implement sidewalk extension on Edmonston Road, 63rd Avenue, Oliver Street, 64th Avenue & East Pine.	Address known pedestrian safety concerns; demonstrate attention to youth safety concerns
5. Develop community maintained pocket parks near Bladensburg Community Center.	Improve and manage undeveloped parcels that currently are being vandalized

LANGLEY PARK SIGNATURE PROJECT:

○ North West Brant Trail Improvements

- ✦ Add lighting to extend the useable hours of the trail network and signage and markings to help pedestrians navigate trail
- ✦ Address gang activity along trail by increasing ranger, park and police patrols and expand 'Wellness Zones,'
- ✦ Remove vegetation that impedes visibility of other people on and off the trail
- ✦ Enhance the trail surface conditions as needed to provide an all-weather surface that reduces the need for shortcuts and other off-trail travel

[TABLE 5] LANGLEY PARK - OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation	Rationale
1. Consider increasing police and park ranger foot and bicycle patrols in around parks, trails, and community center facilities.	Address known pedestrian and bicyclist safety issues as identified by youth and leadership forum participants
2. Work with Boys & Girls Club and nearby property owner to improve safety of existing social pathway leading between the two properties.	Positively impact known pedestrian safety concerns; strategic engagement with Boys & Girls Club organization
3. Develop community maintained pocket park near Langley Park Community Center.	Improve and manage undeveloped parcel that is currently vandalized and an attractive nuisance
4. Implement active lifestyle activities based out of the Langley Park Community Center; e.g., Walks with community champions.	Activities to address obstacles to active travel and use of parks, trails, recreation center
5. Formalize and improve the diagonal social trail that connects the large apartment complex south of the community center to Merrimac Drive.	The existence of the social trail indicates a connectivity need that is currently not met by the formal circulation system. Improving the surface of this route will keep it from being widened over time.

SUITLAND SIGNATURE PROJECTS:

- Natural Surface Trail Identification & Enhancements- Suitland Bog Connections & Access
 - ✦ Involve community residents in design of trail connecting Suitland Bog to Suitland Community center
 - ✦ Develop interpretive trail and directional signage as well as active programming
- Improve existing trails and the entry points to the neighborhoods formalized. Improvements should include enhancements to trail surface conditions, vegetation removal and lighting.
 - ✦ Suitland Recreation Center Striped and/or Signalized Crosswalks
 - ✦ Construct a trail from the developed area in Suitland Community Park to the Suitland Community Center to facilitate neighborhood connectivity

[TABLE 6] SUITLAND – OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation	Rationale
1. Implement pedestrian crossings, traffic calming, painted or protected bicycle lanes, and connectivity opportunities for Silver Hill Road, Pennsylvania Avenue, Branch Avenue, and Marlboro Pike.	Address known pedestrian safety issues relative to high traffic volume corridors inhibiting safe crossing between regular community destinations; facilitate safe active access to attractions in D.C.
2. Install seating and safe waiting areas at transit stops within ½ mile of Suitland Community Center.	Address known pedestrian safety issues identified by youth during PhotoVoice activity and user feedback
3. Evaluate social pathways around Suitland Community Center; involve youth in developing ideas to improve safety and formalize their use	Positively impact known pedestrian safety concerns; address connectivity between neighborhoods and Suitland Community Center
4. Install pedestrian refuges, signalized crossings, and painted or protected bicycle lanes on Pennsylvania Ave. & and Suitland Road.	Address known pedestrian and bicyclist safety concerns; demonstrate attention to concerns

X. CONCLUSION

The Safe Access to Recreational Opportunities Blueprint project reinforces the multitude of existing state, county and local plans poised to transform the communities of Bladensburg, Langley Park and Suitland into models for healthy living opportunities. Prioritizing safe travel between important community connections and collaboration among county agencies, elected officials, community leaders and business owners will be a key requirement. To achieve the greatest short-term success toward safer, more livable communities, a scaled down approach involving low-cost improvements identified through the community engagement process, while continuing long-range capital planning and policy evaluation is recommended.

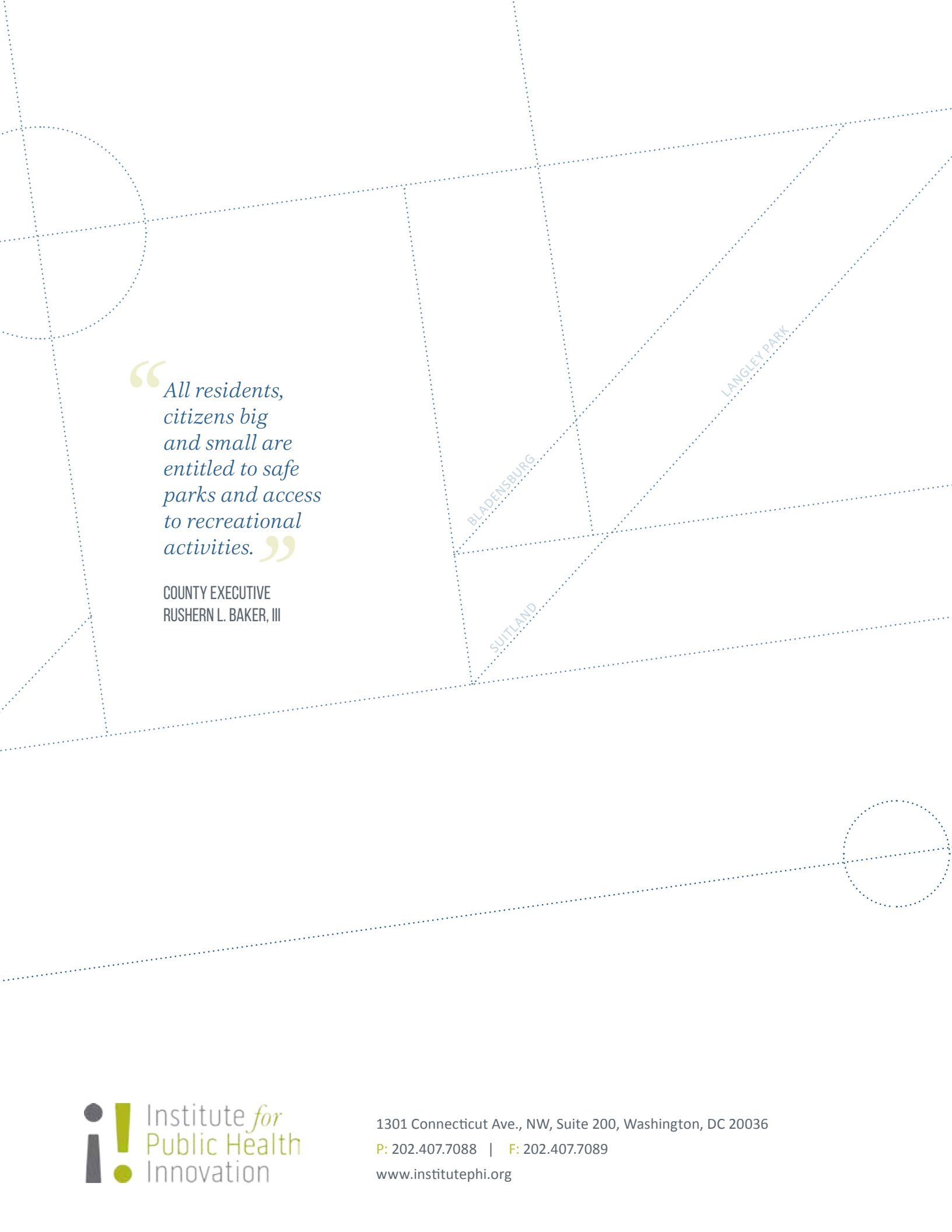
“We have a pretty good network of outdoor recreational space. Not all neighborhoods are well served though. Some neighborhoods have challenges. People will not use a recreational center...if it's in a location that they feel is unsafe,. Some playgrounds are secluded, and there are no eyes on them. It is especially challenging at night time, for youth.”

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY POLICYMAKER

BLADENSBURG

SUITLAND

LANGLEY PARK



*“All residents,
citizens big
and small are
entitled to safe
parks and access
to recreational
activities.”*

COUNTY EXECUTIVE
RUSHERN L. BAKER, III

BLADENSBURG

LANGLEY PARK

SUITLAND